

The rediscovery, after 56 years, of the Heath Rat
Pseudomys shortridgei (Thomas, 1907)(Rodentia: Muridae)
in Western Australia

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The Heath Rat *Pseudomys shortridgei* (Thomas, 1907), was described from a single individual obtained by G. Shortridge in 1906 in the course of the Balston Expeditions (Shortridge 1936). The specimen was collected at "Woyaline Wells", which later became the gazetted townsite of Woyerling (32°31'S, 117°24'E). The only other specimens taken as fresh material in Western Australia were two received by the Western Australian Museum (M1389, M1406) in April and June 1931 from Joyce Savage, who lived near Buniche in the south-eastern wheat belt. The first had been caught by the family cats, presumably near the homestead on her parents' property, Roe Location 1182 at 32°52'S, 118°48'E, which is immediately south of the current Harris Nature Reserve (No. 32549). In 1961 *P. shortridgei* was discovered living in western Victoria (e.g. Seebeck 1976).

Material from surface cave deposits shows that immediately before European colonization, *P. shortridgei* had an extensive distribution (Figure 1) through the west coastal heaths and the mallees of south-western Australia, reaching to the extremities of the South-west Botanical Province of Beard (1980) (Butler and Merrilees 1971; Archer and Baynes 1973; Baynes 1982, in press). Until recently it seemed that *P. shortridgei* had disappeared from its entire Western Australian range, and it was generally regarded as extinct in the state (e.g. Cockburn 1983).

Its rediscovery comprises a typical combination of coincidence and serendipity (see Ride 1970, Chap. 2).

The first indication that *P. shortridgei* might have persisted until relatively recently, came in the form of remains of three individuals in a small owl pellet deposit found in 1984 in a dead tree by K. Bradby, south-west of Ravensthorpe and north of the Fitzgerald River National Park (Figure 1). The associated fauna was restricted to extant species. There was no indication of the precise age of the material, but it appeared unlikely to be more than a few decades old.

The next, much stronger lead arose out of the fauna survey of Fitzgerald River National Park being carried out by Chapman. In January 1987 he sent bones from

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